

John Conyers Jr.

No Rush to Impeachment

As Republicans have become increasingly nervous about whether they will be able to maintain control of the House in the midterm elections, they have resorted to the straw-man strategy of identifying a parade of horrors to come if Democrats gain the majority. Among these is the assertion that I, as the new chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, would immediately begin impeachment proceedings against President Bush.

I will not do that. I readily admit that I have

First, a committee should comprehensively review the administration's alleged abuses.

been quite vigorous, if not relentless, in questioning the administration. The allegations I have raised are grave, serious, well known, and based on reliable media reports and the accounts of former administration officials.

But none of these allegations can be proved or disproved until the administration answers questions. For example, to know whether intelligence was mistaken or manipulated in the run-up to the Iraq war, we need to know what information was made available to — and actually read by — decision makers and how views contradicting the case for war were treated.

We need to know the extent to which high-ranking officials approved of the use of torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment inflicted upon detainees. We need to know whether the leaking of the name of a covert CIA operative was deliberate or accidental, as well as the identity of those responsible.

The administration's stonewalling, and the lack of oversight by Congress, have left us to guess whether we are dealing with isolated wrongdoing, or mistakes, or something

worse. In my view, the American people deserve answers, not guesses. I have proposed that we obtain these answers in a responsible and bipartisan manner.

It was House Republicans who took power in 1995 with immediate plans to undermine President Bill Clinton by any means necessary, and they did so in the most autocratic, partisan and destructive ways imaginable. If there is any lesson from those "revolutionaries," it is that partisan vendettas ultimately provoke a public backlash and are never viewed as legitimate.

So, rather than seeking impeachment, I have chosen to propose comprehensive oversight of these alleged abuses. The oversight I have suggested would be performed by a select committee made up equally of Democrats and Republicans and chosen by the House speaker and the minority leader.

The committee's job would be to obtain answers — finally. At the end of the process, if — and only if — the select committee, acting on a bipartisan basis, finds evidence of potentially impeachable offenses, it would forward that information to the Judiciary Committee. This threshold of bipartisanship is appropriate, I believe, when dealing with an issue of this magnitude.

One-party rule has dug our nation into a deep hole over the past six years. The Judiciary Committee needs to fully implement the recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission, strengthen laws against wartime fraud, ban trade with state sponsors of terrorism, increase funding for community policing and protect government whistle-blowers. Most important, before we have another presidential election, I believe we need to pass laws protecting the integrity of our electoral system — the very foundation of our democracy.

The writer is a Democratic representative from Michigan.